

## **Testimony Concerning Placing a Proposed Constitutional Amendment Bill to protect public lands (SJ 36) on the ballot**

My name is Starr Sayres and I am a resident of East Haddam, CT. Thank you for holding this hearing to place a Constitutional Amendment to protect our public lands in Connecticut on the ballot. It is a subject near and dear to my heart. My husband and I, who cherish the Connecticut River and its environs, watched with deep concern several years ago when a unique piece of State-owned property across the River from us was being considered in trade for a piece of undistinguished forested property further north. Fortunately, the financial inequity of the trade, together with dissenting voice of the public, prevailed, and the trade was extinguished. We likewise were saddened when another valued piece of property that was part of Hammonasset State Park was successfully passed to the Town of Madison for its uses. This past year, several other dismaying trade proposals across the State were brought to our attention, causing new alarm.

These giveaways willfully break the trust of the people of Connecticut for our government, whom we hold responsible for protecting lands that have been acquired over many decades, some given in good faith to the State to provide us with the kind of lifelong quality that comes with abundant outdoor recreational opportunities and relief from our increasingly urbanized lives.

A Constitutional Amendment would ensure that publicly owned lands – lands of we the people – cannot be sold or given away 1) without a local public hearing, 2) without a more strenuous majority than that currently required, 3) without fair compensation to the locality where the property is lost, and 4) as an add-on to any other bill, allowing passage with little or no notice.

I am heartened by the hope that a Constitutional Amendment could provide assurances that lands of special meaning and value to all of us will be better protected against sale, or otherwise loss to future generations. I am strongly in favor of placing **SJ 36** on the ballot.

## **Testimony in Opposition to Section 5 and Section 8 of the 2016 Conveyance Act (HB 5619)**

It has come to my attention that as part of the **2016 Conveyance Act**, six coastal properties in the Town of Groton, in aggregate 66 acres, are being proposed for transfer to the Town for “economic development, recreation and open space purposes” (**Section 8**). In my view, this would be an irresponsible release of state lands. Waterfront properties that have the potential to provide public seaside

recreation, whether hiking, bird watching or simply finding a quiet moment, are a rare and treasured state asset. They should be protected with uncompromising determination. Once transferred to Groton, this coastline land is gone from the public domain forever and becomes the privilege of Groton residents only. We have seen in towns, such as Madison, the difficulties and bad feeling that arise from denying out-of-town residents access to town-owned shorefront. We have a responsibility to protect and conserve what remains of our treasured Connecticut coastline for all to enjoy. I ask for removal of this provision from HB 5619.

**Section 5** of this same bill has also raised a red flag, as I am unable to fully understand the implications of the proposed study. I would ask that this provision be removed from **HB 5619** and redrawn for further consideration at a later time.

Thank you for your kind attention.